

Unkindest Cut

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Unkindest Cut

by [AquitaineQueen24](#)

Summary

A animal caught in a trap will gnaw off its foot to escape.

Alina does not have sharp teeth. She has a piece of a mirror.

Notes

Please be warned, the first part of this one shot contains descriptions of cutting and self-harm, starting round about 'Watching her fingers in the mirror just makes it worse'. If you'd prefer not to read it, please do skip to 'Don't stop me.'

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

When Genya is finished with all the many hair pins, deems her ready and leaves for whatever duties she has next, all proud in her red and blues, that's when Alina takes up the letter opener. It didn't even need to be hidden under a pillow, just left out in plain sight on a table! Could be Kirigan thought she wouldn't think to use it against anyone. More likely he believed she couldn't do any harm with it against Ivan and that she wouldn't bring herself to hurt Genya.

No! Damn it! Not as sharp a point as it could be. Would breaking a sliver out of one of the mirrors be too noisy?

She picks the smallest mirror from the dressing table, places it under the mattress for muffling and punches the bedding. On the third blow, there are enough cracks to pull out a good-sized piece. Yes, that's sharp enough. And here, a handkerchief, so she can actually hold it.

No more avoiding it. Time for a larger mirror.

Looking at her reflection, *there* they are, repulsive as ever. Bulging. Bursting. Sprouting from her as if they're still growing, even when the stag's dead.

Alina swallows the burn racing up her throat, the sourness of her mouth and stomach. Got to do this. Think of skinning rabbits. Skin the rabbit, off comes all its clothes. Won't need to be too deep a cut.

Where to start? She has to test how deep they are, beneath her skin.

She'll need to touch them.

Watching her fingers in the mirror just makes it worse. Feeling the shapes beneath her skin, there's, ugh, *pressure*, it's solid under her fingers.

Solid for now. What if they started moving? Growing? The stag rebelling and crying out for revenge!

Not that deep. Only just beneath the skin. She could pierce through with her fingernail, it's that shallow.

All. All she has to do is cut along the middle of them. Clear a way, then. Pull them out.

Only, only what if they need to be cut free *underneath* the antler as well? Saints help her, if David's fused them to her own bones. She'll be digging and rooting around in her chest with a piece of glass, prying and piercing, oh Saints *getting stuck*.

She has to get them out.

So, so. She'll start with the left shoulder. At the very point where the antler sticks out most. Then if she cuts along the full length of it, she, she can try pulling at it. Even if she breaks only a bit off then it might damage or decrease its power, and his hold on her?

So. Hurry up and *do* it. Get to work.

The sweat's starting already between her fingers. She'll need to be so careful with the mirror edge.

Here we go.

There's the discomfort as her chest learns what her fingers already know, the potential for sharpness. Then the pressure. A bursting first slice at the antler's edge. More pressure. More. Fuck, it needs *more*.

Come on. Keep going. Alina thinks of that teacup shard she used for beating the Grisha test. She'll beat this too, she'll cut it out, get it *out*.

Except, this pain is not to be endured quietly, it isn't blooming in one place, she'll have to move and shepherd it. It needs to grow, to, hah, to *branch out*.

Don't just pierce and sink it in. Slice. Again. Do it until she can find the antler.

Saints, such blood.

Stop a second. Breathe. Hand's sweating more already, it's soaking the handkerchief, it'll make it more slippery. Sweat at one end and blood seeping into the cloth from the cutting edge, soon it'll be swimming.

Right. All right. Try this: Kirigan's ring blade digging into her arm, slicing, bringing out her light. She endured that. And there's no way now for *this* point to go too deep into her flesh. It's not like the teacup and the meat of her palm.

Begin again.

The very next cut, she slips and the edge goes wild. Reflected is a great gouge like a whole new antler prong, the blood squeezing out into the air and dripping down her front. This is insane. How deep has it gone? A wet patch growing between her dress and her skin.

Keep calm. Back up, bring the mirror edge back up. Centre. Keep it in the centre of the antler. She bites her free fingers for a different pain, for distraction, for no screams.

All right, all right, pause. Switch hands, wipe the sweat off her palm. Cold, why is it so cold in here? How far is there still to go?

Now Alina stares at her trembling sweaty mirror face, what a wreck she's made of herself! Even worse than the mess Kirigan and David left for her. But in this mess she can see the darkness of the antler lying nestled inside her, like a maggot burrowing.

The cut needs to get to the end of this antler, then she can rest again before the next one. Come on.

Little more.

Nearly to the edge, now the shard's beneath her chin. The blood's tickling between her breasts. Her hand's too sweaty again, mustn't slip. Keep going. Keep going, just get to the centre!

There. That's done, rest. And Alina, looking away from her bloody mirror self, above and beyond the frame, sees *how long has he been there*

She gets the edge of the shard to her neck, oh, if she jabs it to the left! 'Don't stop me.' If he tries to get it away from her with the Cut he'll take her head off, just like the poor stag, fitting end for both of them!

His hands are rising, yet too slow and far apart for any Small Science gesture. He means to lull her before he grabs her. Back, move back to find room, just keep away from the walls. Can't let him box her in.

The antler. Grab the freed antler and try to pull, or if it's too stuck inside then *break* the bloody thing and get to see his horror.

She finds it, she *pulls*

something several somethings splitting Saints *no no no*

So Kirigan gets her right wrist and slaps the mirror away, he seizes her left hand. The tent's spinning. They end up with his heart banging into her shoulder blade and his arms holding

her own crossed in front of her, useless. The pain in her chest is immense and tearing, he's splitting her further open like this.

'Ivan.' He sounds most angry, good. The man himself pokes his head through the entrance, surprised at the little clinch they're in. 'Ivan, bring Genya back.'

No, he doesn't get to paint this away. He wants to parade her around with *this* sticking out of her chest, he gets the mess and blood too. The scar from the teacup goes, the clawing from his ring goes but this stays!

He's whispering in her ear, all nonsense stuff, shushing – he's trying to gentle her, just like his stallion! Fuck that. 'Don't, don't you do that, I'm not your *horse*.' She tries a stamp down his shin to squash his foot, but it's through swathes of a dress, she's in slippers and he's in a boot anyway, useless.

Here comes Genya back again, stopping all shocked in the doorway. Yes, see me, see a man grappling with a blood-soaked pain brimming woman, Genya, Genya, *help me!*

Kirigan, pulling back Alina's reaching beseeching right hand, says, 'Genya, quickly.'

'Yes, sir.'

Alina doesn't *let* Kirigan drag her to the chair, she makes him strain and pull and lift her along for every step. Might be he's paying her back for it when, sitting down, he pulls her right between his spread legs and tight against him. He feels like he'll close about her and fold her in half like a map, crushing the details inside. Her chest feels like it's ripped wide as the Fold.

Still. He left *her* legs free. Even if she has nothing on her feet but slippers, see how close Genya dares to get to Alina when she *kicks!* It barely misses; the force of it carries her down Kirigan's chest. She can slide out and get to the floor.

He pulls her back up, hooks a booted foot around her ankle, holds one leg strained and trapped and stabbed by that spur of his No force left in Alina for her to move her other leg enough to do any damage.

She could bite him; she could spit at Genya. Coming nearer she sees the Tailor's all open mouthed and concerned. 'Alina, what have you *done*?'

That's so *funny!* Really! '*What does it look like?!*'

Kirigan's chin, digging into her left shoulder. If she timed and jerked just right, she could get him in the eye with the antler, see if Genya could heal that! 'Genya. If you would be so kind.'

But Genya is not kind. That's fair, Alina can be unkind to match.

She waits until Genya's touching her, right where her cutting reached. And then she strikes with: '*David* did this to me. He put this under my skin. So ingenious.'

The strike lands, for Genya quivers and her fingers pause.

'He shoved this under my skin while Ivan was holding me still, and all ordered by *him*,' Alina tosses her head to knock Kirigan away, might as well bash her temple against a wall! 'Just like he did with you.'

'Genya.' Kirigan's very angry, good, good, let him reckon with what he did, without any sweetness or disguise! He moves in some way that forces Alina's chin up, until she can't see anything but the tent roof above them.

He can't stop her saying it! 'Clever David forced this into me! They forced me! How'd you like that?!"

That gentle steady touch is the worst thing. It's soothing, it tickles while sealing up each tear and wiping out all her efforts. The pain tries to escape by rushing up her shoulder but there's no way out. Kirigan collared her, Genya's sealing his collar back inside her, if Alina must bite a hole through her tongue and lips what does it matter, so long as they don't get to see her cry?

She watches the chandelier. Ridiculous that Kirigan wanted her to have a chandelier. Or, no, it's that he wanted her in a room with a chandelier, with all these mirrors and a letter opener and beautiful black gown, all perfect in place. A lovely setting for his treasure.

Genya reaches the point where Alina started cutting, only to return back the same way she came. Why is she still rubbing her fingers everywhere? Didn't she do it perfectly the first time round? Probably wants to make sure there's not a trace left, not even a line.

Why does Kirigan hold her? Why doesn't he have Ivan restrain her again? Then he could stand back and watch his work be properly safeguarded, and not risk getting spiked in the cheek.

Alina thinks Genya might be moving to touch up her face next, to deal with the sweat and the stray hairs, but Kirigan says 'No,' and so she feels the Tailor moving back and away. Kirigan moves his head enough to let her look down and see the other woman, if she wants to. She finds that she does. The Tailor's hands are red with Alina's blood, but Genya doesn't look as if she's about to cry. Pity.

'Leave,' Kirigan says, and off Genya goes without a murmur.

That leaves Alina with Kirigan. She tests his grasp. It is hard again and steady like the shackles he had her in last night. Might as well try: 'Let go of me.'

'Hardly. I'll not have you trying to impale yourself on another shard.'

'I wasn't trying to kill myself.'

‘And yet I found you with a blade at your throat.’

‘I don’t want to die. I want this *out* of me.’ She tries standing, even just on one leg. Of course he pulls her back down.

In yet another mirror, a different mirror, she sees his teeth bared. ‘You might as well try to cut out your heart. You cannot hurt yourself like this. I will not have it. You will *never* do this again.’

‘You can’t stop me. Even *if* you take away every blade and sharp thing, you can’t stop my nails. Can’t stop me *digging*. Would you cut my fingers off?’

‘Oh, I’d keep you in the stocks again. Until you learned the futility of it.’

She doesn’t want to meet his eyes in the mirror yet. She keeps looking to the antlers, tucked up snug in her skin once more. Genya even mopped away every trace of the blood after she was done with the stitching, so thorough, so that’s why she lingered.

‘That’s how you like me. Powerless and dependant.’ He’s so close that, in the flesh, she might not see him even if she twists her neck enough. She tries it, to see what he’ll do. It’s a dreadful moment when he clearly doesn’t move an inch and her lips find the edge of his mouth; she twists back too quick, making a fresh new pain. ‘Spread wide open for you to take everything.’

Following her retreat, pressing his cheek to hers, he asks her this: ‘Are you truly so careless of your tracker’s life?’

Mal, Saints, *Mal*.

Kirigan speaks so calmly, his mirror face curious, ‘After you chose him over the stag, after all your wailing for me to heal him?’

Mal. Forgotten in the mad moment of wanting these things *out* of her. A rabbit straining at the snare throttling it, a fox biting off its own paw to get out of a trap, they do that, that was her. Thoughtless, stupid.

For Mal, Alina can give Kirigan this. She settles herself back against his chest, enough to feel his heart once more and the breath he sucks in. As she lets the back of her neck touch his shoulder, she tries: ‘Let Mal go, and I’ll never touch them again, not even to pick at them. I’ll do whatever you ask.’

‘And where would you have me release him to? Into the wild, to wander and babble all he knows? Or to a work camp, to slave away the rest of his short life? I will keep him with me. Anything you do to yourself, he will share. But I will not waste the efforts of my healers upon him any further.’

Alina looks back to the ceiling. She won’t have to see his face in the mirror, he won’t get to see hers. ‘Right.’

With her back arching like this, she can feel the river of sweat beginning to spread through the cloth of her dress. She gets the mad urge to press herself against him once more, just to completely befoul his *kefta*.

He is growing softer about her, his thumb’s quite gentle going back and forth over her wrist. She must get out of his grip, before she starts to bear it. ‘Are we done?’

‘Shockingly enough, *no.*’ Kirigan sits forward and upward, finally uncrossing her arms, the relief! ‘There will be a crossing today, where all the world will see your power. There will be foreign diplomats on this journey through the Fold.’

‘Another display? What d’you suppose they’ll think, when they see you aiming and firing their Sun Summoner like a rifle? Do you think they’ll cheer at your marksmanship?’

‘They’ll see nothing of the sort. There will only be us working together, to master the Fold. As it was always meant to be.’

Fine, she’ll meet his mirror eyes. ‘There is no together in this. You *always* wanted me collared. You couldn’t wait to put your leash on me.’

He brings her hands closer but still too far apart to touch, resting them in her lap. She watches him look at the antlers. Not admiring them at least, no satisfaction. ‘This, was meant to increase your power. To enable you to stand at my side. But then you ran from me. You fled in the night. I thought at first you had been kidnapped. I thought you would never have left me. I tracked your supposed kidnappers down. To rescue you.’

Those three, at the cart. The woman she saw in oprichnik gear at the fete, the one who let her run when the other two were blinded. What did he do to them?

‘But do you know what I learned, when I cornered one of them?’ Kirigan’s eyes look up at this, very cold. ‘That they hadn’t kidnapped you at all. That you had fled from me of your own accord. That you were not interested in being a *captive* anymore.’ He’s sour with it, it’s glorious, she loves it. ‘Did you hate me so much?’

He asks this while closed in around her, while holding her wrists and pinioning one of her legs, just after staring long and hard at the leash he ordered for her! Does her hate *her*, to punish her in this way? Only she must remember, it’s not a punishment, just an extra fit of temper on his part. He’d always meant to do this to her.

She tries again to lift every part of her as far from him as possible. ‘More that I wasn’t keen on staying in the clutches of the Black Heretic.’

A different sort of anger comes into his mirror face. ‘Baghra. How could you so easily believe the twisted words of that angry, old woman?’

‘She told me the truth. More than you ever did.’

His lips are still soft, at her ear again: ‘You could have waited, you could have come to me. I would have explained. I’d have told you the other side of Baghra’s half-truth.’

‘Oh, you’d have lied. You lie like you breathe.’ Alina can’t bear the sight of their reflections right now. She looks to the mirror frame. ‘You lied about your ancestor and all your guilt. About the Fold. Us beating it together, what a lie *that* was. You just wanted me on my feet, so you and David didn’t have to strain yourselves, bending down to collar me.’

He’s curling so close and tight about her that she imagines him suddenly snapping shut like a trap or a box and crushing her.

‘What did you do to Baghra?’

‘You think that I would harm her?’

If Baghra thwarted him, oh yes he would. Look what her own defiance got her. Try another tactic, another angle. ‘Genya told me about the king. The Apparat.’

He’s utterly still.

‘Go on. Lie to me about that as well. Tell me the king’s merely ill, the Apparat full of concern for his master. Nothing to do with you at all.’

That trace of teeth on her skin, not even his lips now. So slight, she wonders if he even knows how he brushes against her. ‘Continuing to serve such a king would make me a traitor to my country. And my conscience.’

If Alina opens her mouth right now, at this very moment, she’ll laugh or cry enough never to stop and she’ll be lost. What *conscience*?

Right. Next blow. ‘And yet you’ll happily shove Genya into serving the queen. Pushing her into the king’s bed.’

In the mirror his eyebrow lifts. That’s all he feels Genya warrants or deserves? ‘She told me that, too. And after she suffered years of hell for you, doing your dirty work, she gets a red kefta. Wonderful. What do *I* get, if I behave myself and play the part? Another necklace? A crown?’

He buries his face in her hair for a heartbeat, pressing the hairpiece hard into her scalp, his breath spreading through the locks and plaits Genya created on his orders. He comes out again quite calm. ‘Genya is a soldier-’

‘So she said; but I never heard *my* commander telling us to fuck the Fjerdans.’

‘-a *soldier*; serving in a war that’s been waged against us for centuries. Would you rather I’d ordered her into the battlefield, to be gunned down or ripped apart by our enemies?’

There. So nearly the same as his words on the first day they met: *Would you prefer if I’d used a sword?* Would it have been better if he’d set the Grand Palace afire and overthrown it in blood, rather than with deceit and poison and Genya’s pain?

‘Or would you like me-’

-how can he possibly pull her closer, how has he not crushed her by now –

‘-to tell you of the things *I’ve* had to do, to protect our people? One slimy, distasteful task after another for each successive, *wretched* Lantsov king, until I was permitted to build the Little Palace? Allowed to collect Grisha to be trained and gawked at, like a menagerie of pets?’

His breathing is as hard as if he’s been running for his life. Alina thinks, fleeting, that he could bite her too. ‘*Everything* that I have done has built towards this chance. To make

amends. To finally win. And you must play your part too.'

She deliberately makes him watch her gaze drop to the antlers. 'As if I have a choice. Did you ever give Genya one?'

'Does any soldier *choose* to serve, in Ravka? All we can do is endure the burden that we're given. But now.'

He leaves off her wrists, one after the other, to take her hands. He slides his fingers between her own, just his fingertips are enough to fully cover her palms. Says he, 'We will have *every* choice.'

Then why does he keep her hands so far apart, his fingers ready and able to stop her if she tried to touch so much as her thumbs together? 'Except for me.'

'Because you left me without no option. This,' - he says with his lips so close to the antler, he could kiss it! - 'is a means to help us conquer the Fold together. Our servitude will be ended. There will be no way for the king or Zlatan to control the Fold, to trade or spend or slaughter us to serve their ambition.'

And what about Kirigan's ambition? Where does that end, when a coup is merely a stepping stone, not even the final goal?

From nowhere Alina's wrists are held in one single grip instead of two. She's out of his lap and back in it again, sitting down hard on his thigh with her feet caught between his legs. Odd, to think how it's the same way that he hefted her up onto his war room table. She feels the bone of his leg through her dress and against her flesh, just like the weight of the antlers on her own bones. He's left her slightly higher than him. For once, he looks up to her.

A thought comes very wild and sweet; pull him forward onto her breast or lunge forward, skewer him on the antlers, put out his eyes, pierce his rotten tongue!

Another thought following right behind; bury his face between her breasts, risking his eyes and face so long as he gets to pay her back with his lips and tongue.

Something twists, clenches and blooms between her legs, warm and prickling. Let him not have felt that! What a sight they are, her propped up on his knee like a king's mistress.

Alina breathes deeper for some calm, and so that the antlers will move in and out along with her. Doesn't matter if the shift of them under the skin makes her feel sick, as long as she can keep shoving in Kirigan's face what he's done.

The man actually *swallows*. 'I have waited so long for you, and now.' Up his eyes come to meet hers. 'We can conquer the Fold together. Who will stop us?'

He lifts her hands up, near to his own breastbone. He sets them loose; he holds them so gently. He is dry even after clinging so tightly to her sweating fingers and damp palms, and he is warm. 'You cannot do this on your own. And neither can I.'

Well. The last time he made this offer and she let him take her hands, he helped her to her feet one moment and stabbed her in the heart the very next. What new betrayal will he have waiting for her?

From this seat, she can see the flecks and patches where his beard is wet from mixing with her blood. It will dry in grains and crumbs if he doesn't clean himself up. Alina recalls that black handkerchief he gave her on that awful first day, with the druskelle's blood showing against the black.

She lifts her hands out of his grasp slowly, oh, so very slowly that perhaps it's why he lets her go. Does he think he's won, truly? He's all wide-eyed expectation, waiting for her to speak.

She touches the antlers. She swore she'd never tear or pick again, doesn't mean she can't grip at them.

‘We could’ve had this. All of it.’

Now she takes Kirigan’s hands, now she’s the one to lace her fingers through his and feel him relax at her touch. His breath is warm upon her knuckles. Reaching the back of his right hand, she feels but does not care to linger on his own bit of antler, just beneath his skin. The handle of her leash.

She draws his fingertips up over her neckline, over her breasts, finally coming home to rest and press upon the space between the antlers.

‘You could’ve made me your equal. Instead, you made me *this*.’

Do you feel that cut, Kirigan, Aleksander, whoever you are? Did it *hurt*? Can I hurt you?

Alina tries once more to get off him, to stand - and Kirigan lets her stand, even as he’s rising to his feet to follow her. She’s the one who gets to break away, refusing to let him follow even as he’s reaching and beseeching.

‘You don’t care who suffers, as long as you win.’

Does it hurt, Kirigan, my sudden stab in your heart, does it cut, does it bleed?

He breathes like she did when the mirror tore a hole in her chest. She *has* hurt him. She has no need to *make* him her villain. She imagines again that the antlers moving are moving, not squirming in place and in misery but burrowing up her neck to wrap around her throat.

End Notes

Looking back on it, I realise that I don't know if Genya, as a Tailor, would have been able to heal Alina's wounds, but Genya is also the closest thing Kirigan's got when he wants to keep things hushed up. *shrugs*

Works inspired by this one

[trapped like a deer in a cage \(gotta cut off your nose to spite your face\)](#) by [Becky Blue Eyes](#)

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